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Relatedness of private troubles and public issues

Introduction

In his classic book *The Sociological Imagination*, C. Wright Mills states that “Social science deals with problems of biography, of history, and their intersections within social structures” (2000: 143). Mills argued that the social scientists’ task is to relate ‘private troubles’ with ‘public issues’, implying that we need to question the distinction between private and public issues.

Family is a fruitful object with which to study how social structures, changes and events influence people’s personal lives, or, in Mills’ words, how biography and history intersect within social structures. Family and family life is commonly considered to belong to the private sphere, but family and family life is and always has been a target of public interest (see Oinonen 2004b, 2008). A recent example is the programme of Prime Minister Jyrki Katainen’s government (22 June 2011). According to the programme, higher birth rates are one of the principal ways for Finland to reduce the sustainability gap and consolidate public finances (ibid.: 8). Therefore, Finns need to be encouraged to have more children (see Aamulehti, 7.8.2012).

Family has also been at the centre of the theoretical debate about individualization or de-traditionalization. Family is regarded as one of the institutions, social structures and categories that have lost much of their influence in individuals’ lives. It is claimed that individuals have become disembedded from the traditional roles and are free to choose how to live their lives (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 1995; Giddens, 1991; see also Dawson, 2012). There is no denying the decline of regulative traditions, but this does not indicate that individual agency is

unbounded. Although people have leeway, their social actions are shaped by ‘meaning constitutive traditions’ – that is, patterns of sense-making passed down from one generation to the next (Gross, 2005).

Yet families are part of our everyday lives and everyday life appears to us as private and personal, and as the very product of our individual choices (Scott, 2009). We tend to feel that events like moving out from the parental home, setting up a home with a partner, getting married or becoming a parent are unique to us. Or, that we make individual and independent decisions and choices that determine the unique way we practice fatherhood or motherhood. But, in fact, many aspects of our lives are socially shaped. For example, in western societies, most people go through the transitions to adulthood and to parenthood at roughly the same age. Although we have more than one or two ways in which to exercise our familial roles, we tend to found our ways of acting on ideals and models that are passed on from one generation to another. These kinds of patterns in our life course attest that our individual choices are not made in isolation. Personal life is relational. It is affected by other people, and by social structures, institutions, norms and traditions. Yet this does not mean that we have no agency. People are not mere puppets played by social forces but have a degree of free-willed control over their lives. Furthermore, how people live their personal lives, what kind of choices and decisions they make, have an effect on society as well. Thus personal life matters, not only on the level of individual persons but also on the level of the public sphere (May, 2011a, 2011b).

In this book we take up the task that C. Wright Mills assigned to sociologists: to relate ‘private troubles’ with ‘public issues’. The private troubles or dilemmas of personal life we discuss and study in this book are: how to combine family and work; how to fulfil the roles as a mother and father; what are the roles, places and spaces for women, men and children? Furthermore, we are looking for ways (methods) to study the everyday realities of our personal lives. This chapter provides a theoretical frame for the articles in this book by contemplating the public/private distinction from the viewpoint of family, women, men and children, the relationship between individual and social, and by discussing the relatedness of personal.

Private and public

We use distinctions, dichotomies and categorizations to make sense of the complex reality but very often our use of concepts such as 'public' and 'private' is ambiguous (Tervonen-Gonçalves and Oinonen, 2012). In fact, public/private distinction is protean. Different ways of making the distinction emerge from different theoretical discourses, each having their own historical baggage of assumptions and connotations (Weintraub, 1997: 2–3). Usually, however, public and private are used to distinguish different kinds of human action and different realms of social life or different physical and social places where human actions take place. One common way is to see the public/private distinction as a distinction between State administration and the market economy. Another, also very common, way is to define private as the realm of intimacy and family, and public as the realm of sociability and the larger economic and political order (see Weintraub, 1997).

This latter type of public/private distinction reflects the 'privatization' of the family in modern times. A commonly accepted view is that along with modernization, the boundaries between the private world and public life emerged. A strict line was drawn between the private and intimate world of home and family, and the public world of business, associates, acquaintances and strangers. In the meantime, work and non-work ('living') came to be separated and located in strictly separate spheres (e.g. Ariés, 1979; Goody, 2000). The private sphere became identified almost exclusively with the family, and the public became associated with an uncontrollable and even threatening outside world from which the family offered a refuge. It is perceived that the modern family differed drastically from the pre-modern family, which was neither public nor private but, rather, was both at the same time (Kumar 1997: 209–10).

Both social scientists and laypeople have largely accepted the above sketched family history and the distinction between public and private. Undeniably, privatization has occurred and families have changed, but its location strictly in the private sphere is questionable. To grasp the reality regardless of the historical time period we need to see the family as being both private and public at the same time. The family and family life is and always has been a target of public interest. How obvious or discreet the interest is varies over time and place, and depends on the issue. As an example, between the World Wars, measures of the pro-natalist population politics were very obvious around Europe. In Finland, for instance,

those who reached the age of 24 and remained single and childless were punished by an increased tax rate called the spinster's and bachelor's tax, and in Spain, the State awarded annual prizes for families with the largest numbers of children, among other things (Oinonen, 2004b).¹ There are more subtle ways to influence our 'private' lives. One good example is the OECD, which has no executive power but has a huge impact on national policies through its studies, reports and recommendations, such as those concerning child care arrangements and models of work-life balance. With its recommendations, the OECD also comes to define the proper or desired way for people to lead their familial and personal lives. International organizations such as the OECD and the EU influence national policies and politics, and hence the surroundings within which we make our private choices and decisions (Oinonen, 2008).

In reality, it is not possible or even desirable to strictly compartmentalise our lives into distinct life spheres. Family matters interfere with our work and work often tags along to home (e.g. Rönkä and Kinnunen, 2009). Besides, there is more to life than just family and work. The public/private distinction is blurred. Arlie Russel Hochschild (1997) makes an insightful point in claiming that home is being invaded by the time pressures and efficiency demands characteristic of work, while for many, the workplace provides emotional support and self-fulfilment, things we would like to associate with home and family (see Chapter 1).

It is not only the family whose location is ambiguous; different family members also have different positions in the public/private axis. Women and children have traditionally been located in private and men in public. According to the ideal of the modern nuclear family, a man is the breadwinner who spends most of his time in the public world of work and a woman is the care taker in the private world of home. In an updated version, the division of proper places and roles for genders is not as clear-cut. Now, the ideal European family is an 'adult worker family' that ideally places both women and men equally into the public and private spheres. However, in practice, the adult worker family often translates into a one-and-a-half-earner family model, at least for those who have small children. We may

¹ Although the most intense period of pro-natalist policies in Finland and Spain dated between the World Wars, the laws and practices aiming at encouraging people to marry and have children held until the mid-1970s. The spinster's and bachelor's tax in Finland remained effective from 1935 to 1975 (Finlex, 2012) and in Spain, large families were rewarded with the annual prizes from 1941 to 1976 (Meil, 2006).

say that the contemporary European ideal family (imposed by the OECD, EU, governments and research) is composed of a full-time working father, a part-time working mother and their two children who early on are socialized, educated and taken care of by professionals outside the home most of the time (Oinonen, 2008: 178–182; see also Esping-Andersen, 2009; Esping-Andersen et al., 2002). To ensure economic growth, competitiveness, survival of the welfare state and cognitive development of children, it is desirable that women with small children not only dedicate themselves to child-care at home but also take an active part in working life. So today, women are expected to have one foot firmly in the private sphere and the other in the public sphere. Men are also hoped to position themselves in a new way in the axis of public and private. They are given the opportunity to be active fathers and take a more participative role in child-care at home by taking advantage of paternity leaves and daddy quotas. Thus men too are encouraged to put more weight on the foot in the private sphere while having the other foot sturdily in the public sphere.

Regardless of these changes, there is a constant debate revolving around the right and proper place of women and children. In Chapter 8, Anna Maria Ifland studies how children and childhood are constructed in political discourse and shows how children's upbringing is not only a private family matter but also, to a great extent, a matter of politics. Thus discussion of whether small children should be taken care of at home (private) or in kindergartens (public) is unresolved and on-going. Some advocate for early childcare provided by professionals outside the home based on pedagogical advantages and equalizing effects on the children's environment for cognitive and social development (see Repo, 2009: 93–97). Others insist on home care provided by parents, and particularly by mothers, based largely on attachment theories (Vuori, 2003). As a case in point, in Chapter 7, Katja Repo reveals how Finnish mothers who have decided to take care of their small children at home after the parental leave period see children as developing and vulnerable beings who need unhurried time and protection from social and institutional pressures. Both camps base their views upon 'the best interest of the child'.

Johanna Mykkänen and Marja Leena Böök (Chapter 6) point out that child-rearing, and also family culture, has become increasingly child-centred as nowadays children have rights and responsibilities both in private (home) and in

public (society). As an example, children are no longer only subject to obligations such as compulsory education but they also have subjective rights such as the right to day-care (in Denmark, Finland and Sweden). Thus although children are strongly associated with the home, family and private spheres, they do have their other foot firmly in the public sphere.

A continuous debate revolves around women's proper place and role. Value and attitude surveys attest that the great majority of Europeans disagree with claims that a man's job is to earn and a woman's job is to look after the home and family (e.g. ISSP, 2004). Although gender equality and equal opportunities are strong and shared norms and values in European societies, their realization is limping (Oinonen, 2008: 172–173). In practice, caring and family tasks are primarily women's responsibilities, indicating that women's inherent place is in private. This remains true also in societies where women's and mothers' labour force participation rate is equally high as men's and where women's (and mothers') full-time work is the norm, like in Finland and Portugal (Barreto, 2005; Eurostat, 2012).

Gina Gaio Santos' and Regina Leite's study on Portuguese academic women's experiences of combining work and family (Chapter 2) indicates that women do not have the same emotional and instrumental support to invest in their careers as men do. Even those couples who do not compete with each other over their rights to build a career and who prefer equality both within and outside the home tend to end up following traditional patterns. In many two-career families it is the man's career that is prioritized. His long working hours, overtime, work-related travelling and absence from home, and lack of time spent with his children or spouse or on household tasks comes with the territory. A woman is expected to deal with work demands, children's demands and partner's demands, and, if she complains, it is to blame her lack of organizational skills rather than lack of support. The tacit outlook seems to be that the proper and most suitable place for a woman, and especially for a mother, is more on the private side, although, in principal, everyone should be equal in all aspects of life regardless of sex and family situation.

In the same vein, Aino Luotonen (Chapter 1) shows how challenging it is for women to negotiate their place and roles along the public/private axis. Analysis of the data gathered by group discussions among Finnish mothers planning to return

to work after maternity and family leave demonstrates what an arduous process it is to negotiate strategies to balance 'private' family life and 'public' work life. Although women do negotiate with employers and partners over the strategies to balance family and work, the toughest negotiations a mother has are with herself. Especially women who have a strong attachment to work seem to be riven with their double role, expectations and aspirations. They feel strong loyalties for their children, partners and family but also for their colleagues and employers at work and for their own career. Whether a mother stays at home with her small children or whether she goes to work and leaves her children to be taken care of by others, she feels guilty and society lays a guilt trip on her. This is a pronounced tendency, at least in Finland, where both full-time wage work and home care for children under the age of three are strong and vigorous norms (see Chapter 7).

Today, men's proper place and role has become a topic of discussion too, but it does not have the same moralistic undertones as in the case of women (and children). In the name of reconciliation of work and family and gender equality, men are encouraged to take better advantage of the care leave days earmarked for fathers and to take a more active role in childcare in general (see Chapters 3 and 5). But fathers of small children are not frowned upon if they do not exercise their right for a stay-at-home-dad period and withdraw from public to private. Anna-Lena Almqvist's and Lars Dahlgren's study of Swedish fathers (Chapter 3) indicates that the most common reasons for men's decisions for taking only a few days of leave (or not at all) are difficulties in being away from work, either because colleagues should not be let down or because of the family economy. It appears that a provider role is still the primary role expected of men with families and thus the decision not to take a more active role in the private sphere and use their right for paternity leave is interpreted as a decision made for the (economic) benefit of the family. Besides, fatherhood is perceived as something personal that may be chosen, whereas motherhood is seen more as a duty (see Vuori, 2009). Furthermore, it is still perceived both by society and by individual men and women that a father's primary duty is to provide for the family, which is an action located in the public sphere, and a mother's primary role is to care and nurture, which is an action located in the private sphere (see Gross, 2005).

Individual and social

Family and family life has been at the core of the discussion and theorising on individualization. The key argument of the individualization thesis, or de-traditionalization thesis, is the increase in individual choice (Smart, 2007).

In short, the individualization thesis claims that in western societies, traditional social structures, categories and institutions such as class, gender, family, kin and the Church have lost much of their influence in individuals' lives. Consequently, individuals have become 'disembedded' (Giddens, 1991) from traditional roles, giving them more freedom or agency to choose how to live their lives. It is claimed that in the past, gender, social class, family, kin and the Church defined our lives so that the 'path' was clear. In other words, people had predestined life trajectories. In contemporary societies, however, individuals must construct their own biographies (see Beck, 1992). They have to accumulate resources and competences and use them to create the kind of identities and lives they want. In Zygmunt Bauman's (2000) terms, individualization means that identity is transformed from a 'given' to a 'task' and individuals need to take responsibility for this task.

The increase in individual choice has led to both pessimistic views (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 1995) and to a more positive outlook on family (Giddens, 1992). According to the pessimistic view, de-traditionalization and atomization of individuals in their task of creating their individual life trajectories produces a reaction in the form of a yearning for love and stable relationships. This explains why the majority of people want to and eventually do get married and have children, even though divorce is common and the demands of equality and flexibility and mobility in the labour market, and changes in gender roles and relationships push families and partners apart. According to Ulrich Beck and Elisabeth Beck-Gernsheim (1995), there is no structural basis on which to sustain such relationships. On the contrary, all of the social forces seem to work against them.

There are social forces, for example, in the labour market that put pressure on partnerships and family relationships, and pose conflicting demands (see Chapters 1–3, 8). But, at the same time, there are social forces that seem to endorse marriage and family. For example, at frequent intervals the media reports on research attesting that stable relationships and, particularly, marriage promote

physical and mental health and well-being. Furthermore, in different societies there are laws and policies that bolster couple and family relationships. In Finland, inheritance laws, for example, tend to encourage people to contract marriages as co-habiting heterosexual couples are not regarded as equal to married couples (Oinonen, 2008). So, not all social forces are necessarily working against marriage and family.

Anthony Giddens (1992) has argued that due to the increase in individual choice, marriage as an institution has weakened. Marriage is no longer the precondition for an active sex life or having children, nor is it contracted for life as divorces are more and more common. Giddens claims that this reflects the profound change that has occurred in the views about relationships. Because relationships are based on romantic love, communication and trust, and because they are no longer held together by external constraints, they survive only for as long as they satisfy both partners. Thus the freedom to choose leads to more equal relationships, which Giddens refers to as “pure relationships” (Giddens, 1992; May, 2011a). Although western societies have relaxed their legislation and given spouses the right to decide whether to stay together or not, without explanations to others, external constraints do exist. Custody laws might keep partners together because both parties want to be full-time parents; the economic situation, proprietorships or social standing may hold spouses together; kin may do so as well. Freedom to choose is relative. We may even say that we have no choice but to choose, and sometimes we have only undesirable options to choose from.

The individualization thesis has been much criticized, both for its simplistic view of the past and for its tendency to exaggerate the emphasis on individual choice (Archer, 2007; Smart, 2007; see also Dawson, 2012). Although it is evident that people in western societies have more leeway in their lives than has been the case before, the traditional categories, institutions and norms have not become so weak and insignificant as the individualization thesis suggests. Traditional institutions such as marriage have not become meaningless. Most people marry, and an increasing number of people marry several times. If marriage was insignificant, we would not have heated debates about to whom the marriage is fitting nor would same-sex couples demand full marriage rights (see Oinonen, 2008).

When it comes to individual choice, the reality is that some have more leeway than others. As Bauman suggests, being an individual *de jure* does not guarantee individuality *de facto*. Thus individualization is an uneven ‘redistribution of freedoms’ (Dawson, 2012: 307). One’s class origin, gender, ethnicity and even religion still matter and influence one’s chances in life. Not all have monetary or other resources to be reflexive individuals free from social constraints. Portuguese academic women provide an illustration of stratification within individualization. Women are freed from traditional expectations and norms, as suggested by the individualization theorists, in the sense that they are able to pursue and create an academic career. But, contrary to the theorists’ claim, they are not freed from the traditional norms and routines associated with women. Most Portuguese academic women in Gina Gaio Santos and Regina Leite’s study (see Chapter 2) had difficulties in combining a career with family life precisely because they were expected to fulfil their traditional roles as caregivers and homemakers. Women who had established themselves in academia and had a steady and adequate income could pay for someone else to take over the household and care work at home while they chose to invest in their careers. Academic women who have fixed-term contracts and a low and erratic income cannot buy the freedom to choose. This is only one empirical example of how freedom is relative and stratification within individualization exists.

Despite its shortcomings, the theory of individualization or de-traditionalization has animated scientific and popular debate over families, intimacy and relationships. It has also generated a wide range of empirical research, which provides us with elements for understanding the mechanisms, processes and meanings of everyday and personal lives, and thus refines our theories (Smart, 2007).

Neil Gross (2005) provides one example of theory refinement. He agrees with the individualization theorists that ‘regulative traditions’ have declined. This means that people do not *have to* live in the traditional way. Regulative traditions are those that involve a threat of or actual exclusion from a (moral) community if an individual fails to act according to the ways regarded as important and proper. Related to intimacy and family, such a regulative tradition has been heterosexual, lifelong marriage, which certifiably has declined in all western societies (Gross, 2005: 288): nearly every second marriage ends in divorce (e.g. in Finland, Sweden

and the UK), and those remaining single are no longer punished by an elevated tax rate or a woman no longer has to marry a man in order to become a respectable mother.

However, a decline of traditions does not mean that unbounded individual agency has replaced traditions. In other words, ‘anything does not go’, because social action is shaped by ‘meaning-constitutive traditions’, which are patterns of sense-making passed down from one generation to the next (Gross, 2005: 288). Although a woman who decides to become a mother but not a wife is not a subject of equally intensive social sanctions as in the past, and we do nowadays recognize a variety of living arrangements as families, the image of (heterosexual) coupledness remains to function as a hegemonic ideal and basis for parenthood and family. Meaning-constitutive traditions shape social action, but differently from regulative traditions. They establish limits by constituting the actor as a being who understands and is oriented to the world in a particular way (Gross, 2005: 295–296). Gross emphasizes the importance of shared traditions, habits and habituality, and thus the individual does not appear as a free agent but is embedded in culture and history (see Smart, 2007: 19–20). Therefore, it is understandable why most women do marry the father of their child, even though they don’t have to. In fact, there is much empirical research showing how the majority of people have quite conventional dreams, hopes and expectations concerning intimacy and relationships, and most of us also arrange our lives in a quite conventional manner (e.g. Mary, 2012; Oinonen, 2004a).

Julia Brannen, Ann Mooney and Valerie Wigfall (Chapter 4) examine change and continuity in the practice of fatherhood across family generations. The socio-economic status may change, but certain values, such as a strong work ethic, are transferred from father to son. The transmission of a strong work ethic influences the time spent with the children, but not the second-generation men’s subjectivities as fathers. According to Brannen and others, most second-generation fathers regarded themselves as different from their fathers and more involved with their children. In other words, family generations coexist and are linked by intergenerational transmission, but they belong to a different historical era and thus to different historical generations (see Mannheim, 1952). Intergenerational transmission, like the ‘meaning-constitutive traditions’, influences the way in which we make sense of the world by providing us with norms, values, models of

behaviour and a sense of propriety, which we then (consciously and unconsciously) apply in ways we see suitable for our times.

Relatedness of personal

The concept ‘individual’ portrays people as autonomous, isolated and detached individuals (May, 2011a: 7). The concept ‘personal’ signals the fact that people are not isolated individuals but connected to others. According to Carol Smart (2007: 28), the ‘personal’ denotes an area of life that has a strong impact on and meaning to people but does not presume that it is an autonomous individual who makes free choices and exercises unimpeded agency. Therefore, personal life is premised on the idea that personal is always a part of social because the very possibility of a personal life is dependent on self-reflection and connectedness with others. In other words, “to have a personal life is to have agency and to make choices, but personhood implicit in the concept requires the presence of others to respond to and to contextualize those actions and choices. Personal life is reflexive state, but it is not private and it is lived out in relation to one’s class position, ethnicity, gender, etc.” (ibid.: 28).

It is not only other people that individuals are connected to but also social categories, structures and institutions. As Mills (2000: 10) said, to understand the changes of many personal milieux we are required to look beyond them. Our ‘personal milieux’ is shaped and conditioned by macro, meso and micro-level structures and actors such as economy, credit rating agencies, politics, international organizations, governments, labour markets, policies of all kinds (tax, health, housing, education, labour, welfare, etc.), media, norms, values, traditions, class, gender, ethnicity, religion, kin, family, friends and peers.

Berit Brandth and Grete Overrein study how farming men’s fathering practices have changed over the last generation in Norway and they show how changes in agricultural production and normative changes like emphasis on gender equality affect fathering (Chapter 5). Technological development and increased efficiency have turned farms into mills that have to produce large quantities at a fast pace. Unlike contemporary farmers’ childhoods, farms are no longer a suitable and safe place for children nor are there tasks that children used to do on farms. Besides,

contemporary farming fathers do not see the point in teaching the trade to their children. Furthermore, unlike 30–40 years ago, farming families are increasingly dependent on outside income and most farmers' wives work outside the farm. Owing to structural and normative changes, farming men 'do fatherhood' differently than their fathers did (see Morgan, 1996). Farmers and their wives have to negotiate for child care arrangements and the fathers' active participation is needed as the mothers work outside the farm and the children are no longer minded while working.

In their everyday lives, people are not always consciously aware of the social, cultural, legal, economic or political factors that frame their personal lives and affect their choices, nor does the term 'personal life' belong to their daily vocabulary. Nevertheless, personal life as a term is well suited to capture the contemporary reality of peoples' lives. Unlike 'the family', which emphasises and gives priority to ties based on biology or marital bonds, personal life does not exclude any kind of living arrangements and life styles, be they families of choice, same-sex intimacies, reconfigured kinship formations, etc. Furthermore, the concept 'personal life' includes the idea of change and movement. Unlike the concept of the life course, which is widely employed in family studies and concentrates on the social dimensions of generational and cohort ageing, personal life captures a wider range of factors that change and shift people's lives into new directions (May, 2011a, 2011c; Smart, 2007). For example, financial crisis, retrenchments of care services and benefits, unemployment, divorce or illness, among other things, can transform personal life, affecting income, housing and division of labour between partners, decisions concerning childbearing and general well-being, and shift people into completely new and different places, spaces and situations.

Portugal provides an example of how politics can redirect individuals' lives. The Colonial War (1961–1974) had significant effects on Portuguese families, their intimate relationships and, particularly, women's lives. Young men had to leave their country and family for years to fight in the African colonies. Many of them died or came back seriously injured. The war pushed women into the labour market in large numbers and shifted many of them into the role of main breadwinners in their families, and placed them in the public sphere unlike ever before. Male-dominated emigration enforced this shift. The history of the Colonial War and emigration are seen as the major reasons for the high female

full-time employment rate in today's Portugal (Chapter 2; see also Costa Pinto, 2005).

Personal life is not placed in any specific domain but it is lived simultaneously in many different places and spaces (Smart, 2007: 29). Therefore, the concept personal life also has the potential to overcome the old sociological distinction between the private and public spheres, which has located family life as a distinct domain apart from other social spaces and structures. C. Wright Mills argued that the task of sociologists (and other social scientists) is to relate 'private troubles' to 'public issues'. The articles in this book do just that as they examine how the social structures, norms and categories in different societies and times form the frameworks for individuals' lives and how individuals live their lives and make their choices within these structures or frameworks.

In this book we reveal relatedness on several different levels. We show how things we tend to perceive as the most private, intimate and individual are in fact quite public, shared and influenced by other people, structures and cultures. One important aim of this book is to bring forth and discuss innovative ways to capture the relatedness of personal lives. To study personal life we need to be open to different sources of data. In this book, all the articles are based on qualitative data, but the range of that qualitative data is wide. Face-to-face interviews are perhaps the most common way for social scientists to collect qualitative data that is aimed at exploring an individual's experiences (May, 2011b: 163). In two chapters, the one by Brannen and others (Chapter 4) and the other by Brandth and Overrein (Chapter 5), in-depth interviews have been the method used to get into different generations of fathers' life course events and life stories, and to fathers' experiences of fatherhood and fathering. Also Gina Gaio Santos and Regina Leite (Chapter 2) employ in-depth interviews, first to reach academic women's experiences of their careers and support received from their partners, and second, to identify different discourses. Anna-Lena Almqvist and Lars Dahlgren (Chapter 3) use semi-structured interviews with fathers, mothers and representatives of employers, municipalities and the Social Insurance Agency in order to grasp a broad view of fathers' motives for taking (or not taking) parental leave. The first chapter of the book is based on Aino Luotonen's study, where she applies group discussions to reveal the strategies women plan to use to balance family and work when returning to work life after a leave period. Johanna Mykkänen and Marja Leena

Böök (Chapter 6) are interested in how children view their everyday lives and they experimented with the method of participatory photo narrative to capture the children's point of view. Katja Repo (Chapter 7) uses theme interviews to study how mothers define a child and childhood when they justify their choice to stay at home after the parental leave period to care for their small children at home. To study personal life we do not always need to turn to people, but we can, for example, use quantitative data or different kinds of textual material. Chapter 8 is based on Anna Maria Ifland's study, where she uses German and Norwegian political documents to analyze political arguments about how early child care should be organized.

In the literature concerning family, intimate relationships and parenthood, the topical issue for quite some time has been the so-called work-life balance, and so it is in this book as well. However, we provide fresh perspectives and viewpoints in order to study personal life from the angle of the work-life balance. Although research on fatherhood, caring and men's views on the work-life balance is constantly increasing, the rural setting is largely missing. In this book we provide an insight into farming men's ways to combine work, family and care duties, and also to changes in farming men's fathering practices (Chapter 5). Many studies on fatherhood have focused on short-term or current experiences, yet an intergenerational focus to study fatherhood (Chapters 4 and 5) provides a deeper understanding of contemporary fatherhood. A long-term perspective reveals complexity, contradiction, change and nuance, both in fathering practices and experiences and in fatherhood as a concept, and, furthermore, it locates fathers, fathering and fatherhood in their proper historical and social contexts. In research concerning families and family life, everyday activities and emotions tend to be understudied. Children's activities, emotions and experiences of everyday life, in particular, remain marginal in the research. In this book, children are considered agents in their own right and narrators of their own everyday lives (Chapter 6). Perhaps the majority of the studies on family, intimate relationships and parenthood, as well as the work-life balance, concentrate largely on women and female perspectives. This book makes no exception, although we have aimed at revealing the true complexity of the personal lives of women (Chapters 1 and 2 and also 3, 4 and 5).

In this book, the relatedness of personal becomes apparent on multiple levels. It becomes evident how politics and political debates, public policies, production structures, labour markets and their changes create the frame within which we live our lives and make our choices. We provide empirical evidence on how ethnic origin, class, gender and age continue to influence the degree of freedom of choice and one's chances in life, both positively and negatively. The relatedness of personal to other people becomes quite evident too. Spousal support, or the lack of it, may have a significant impact on career advancement or the division of care leaves, and thus on the gendered division of labour in families and partnerships. It is not only the nearest and dearest that have a huge impact on one's life but also employers, colleagues and friends. How we live our personal lives and what kinds of choices and decisions we make are also related to the norms, values and attitudes that tend to be transmitted from one generation to another, and which each individual has to negotiate and reflect upon in their personal lives.

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I

VARIOUS ROLES OF WOMEN

